Document 1167

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Pursuant to Civil L.R. 7-11, the State Attorneys General (AGs) move this Court to stay its order granting in part and denying in part Meta's request for party discovery, Doc. 1117, pending review by Judge Gonzalez Rogers. This Motion is filed contemporaneously with the AGs' Rule 72 objections to the discovery order ("AGs Objections"), filed as a Motion for Relief.

A magistrate judge may issue a stay under their inherent authority to stay their own order pending a challenge. *See PlayUp, Inc. v. Mintas*, 635 F. Supp. 3d 1087, 1094 (D. Nev. 2022) (citing *Nken v. Holder*, 556 U.S. 418, 426 (2009)). In considering whether to stay a magistrate judge's order pending Rule 72 objections, courts typically apply the same four-factor test used for a stay pending appeal. *Id.* (citation omitted). That test is: (1) whether the stay applicant has made a strong showing of likely success on the merits; (2) whether the applicant will be irreparably injured absent a stay; (3) whether issuance of the stay will substantially injure the other parties interested in the proceeding; and (4) where the public interest lies. *Duncan v. Bonta*, 83 F.4th 803, 805 (9th Cir. 2023) (quoting *Nken*, 556 U.S. at 425–26).

The Ninth Circuit uses a sliding scale approach by which a stronger showing on one element can offset a weaker showing of another. *Al Otro Lado v. Wolf*, 952 F.3d 999, 1007 (9th Cir. 2020) (citation omitted). The "relative hardships to the parties" provide the "critical element" in determining at what point on the continuum a stay pending review is justified. *Leiva-Perez v. Holder*, 640 F.3d 962, 970 (9th Cir. 2011) (citation omitted). The party requesting the stay bears the burden of demonstrating one is warranted. *Al Otro Lado*, 952 F.3d at 1006.

## A. The AGs are likely to succeed on the merits.

To obtain a stay, a movant need only demonstrate that its appeal has a "reasonable probability" or "fair prospect" of success. *Leiva-Perez*, 640 F.3d at 967 (citation omitted). The movant need not show "that it is more likely than not that [it] will win on the merits." *Id.* at 966. Alternatively, a movant can show that its appeal raises "serious" legal questions if the "balance of hardships tips sharply in its favor." *Golden Gate Rest. Ass 'n v. City & Cnty. of San Francisco*, 512 F.3d 1112, 1116 (9th Cir. 2008). In this district, a "serious legal question" generally includes (1) a matter of first impression within the Ninth Circuit, (2) a constitutional question, or (3) a pressing legal issue which urges the Ninth Circuit to hear the case. *See e.g., Yeomans v. World* 

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Fin. Grp. Ins. Agency, Inc., No. 19-CV-00792-EMC, 2021 WL 1772808, at \*3 (N.D. Cal. Mar. 19, 2021) (quoting Stiner v. Brookdale Senior Living, Inc., 383 F. Supp. 3d 949, 953-54 (N.D. Cal. 2019)).

The AGs' Objections satisfy this test under any analysis. First, the AG's objection meets the "fair prospect" test on both issues presented: (1) that control of all state agencies cannot be imputed to a state AG discharging their independent law enforcement function, and (2) that the attorney-client relationship, if it did exist, does not provide attorneys the right to obtain and produce documents on demand from their client. For the reasons fully articulated in the AG's Objections, the AGs have a "fair prospect" of persuading Judge Gonzalez Rogers that the order misapprehends the role of AGs acting as counsel to independent state agencies, misapplies controlling Ninth Circuit authority in shifting the burden to the AGs to demonstrate their lack of control, and disregards the structure of state governments and the substantial federal authority respecting states' sovereign structures. Moreover, the order incorrectly holds that attorneys have the legal right to obtain documents from clients, even to respond to discovery requests served in a case to which the clients are not party.

Second, the issues raised in the AGs' Objections are unequivocally "serious legal questions." The Court's discovery order holding that the executive agencies of thirty-five different states are subject to party discovery in this law enforcement action brought by the AGs creates an issue of first impression in this Circuit. See Maxcrest Ltd. v. United States, No. 15-MC-80270-JST, 2016 WL 6599463, at \*2 (N.D. Cal. Nov. 7, 2016) (granting stay pending appeal on novel issue of first impression in the Ninth Circuit)).

*Third*, the AGs' Objections raise constitutional questions. The Court's order obligates State AGs to exercise a form of control over the records of state agencies that they lack under the divided executive structure of state constitutions. This violates the federalism principles at the heart of our federal constitutional system. See, e.g., Gregory v. Ashcroft, 501 U.S. 452, 460 (1991) ("Through the structure of its government, and the character of those who exercise government authority, a State defines itself as a sovereign.").

# B. A stay is necessary to avoid irreparable injury.

A movant must show that irreparable injury is "likely to occur" during the period before the appeal is likely to be decided. *Al Otro Lado*, 952 F.3d at 1007 (citation omitted). The AGs more than meet that standard. *First*, the discovery order is apt to create conflicts between the AGs and state executive agencies. If allowed to stand, the order places the AGs in the impossible position of responding to discovery seeking documents to which they have no legal right to access, significantly impedes the functioning of state government, and imperils the ability of state AGs to bring enforcement actions in federal court.

Second, the burden imposed by Meta's sweeping discovery request is substantial: 275 agencies are the target of discovery and Meta has represented it plans to take between 70-165 depositions, depending on the ruling in this dispute. Doc. 1109, pp. 6-10, 7 n.5; Doc. 736-1, p. 32. And Meta seeks to impose this burden immediately while the Court considers the AGs' objections. Meta maintains that the consumer protection attorneys prosecuting this action bear the responsibility for coordinating substantial discovery. And, more puzzlingly, Meta suggests that the conferrals already underway with state agencies regarding Rule 45 subpoenas and potentially productions made in response to those subpoenas, are not to be considered in determining what information Meta actually seeks with its requests from the agencies.

Third, if the AGs have to divert their attention to these extremely heavy and contested discovery obligations, progress on other critical and undisputed discovery tasks will be delayed, making it uncertain whether this enforcement action, aimed at protecting the most vulnerable of our citizens, can remain on track. This will delay relief for youth and consumers in 35 states who the State AGs allege suffered and continue to suffer mental and physical health harms as a result of Meta's deceptive and unfair business practices.

#### C. Meta will suffer minimal harm should the Court stay the order.

On the other hand, should the Court stay its order, Meta will suffer little harm. At issue is discovery Meta sought through one means (Rule 34 discovery); meanwhile Meta has sought and received such discovery through other means by issuing over 140 Rule 45 subpoenas to state agencies. Doc. 1120, pp. 13-14; Doc. 1110, pp. 2-8. A stay of the discovery order pending the

AGs' Objections would not halt Meta's discovery of the state agencies which is already underway through voluminous Rule 45 subpoenas. Thus, "a stay pending appeal will not prejudice [Meta's] ability to conduct discovery" and defend against this action. *Pokorny v. Quixtar Inc.*, No. 07-00201 SC, 2008 WL 1787111, at \*2 (N.D. Cal. Apr. 17, 2008).

And Meta's claim of injury from any brief stay while the District Court considers the AGs Objections falls flat. Meta delayed in seeking targeted agency discovery through subpoenas for nearly six months during the pendency of this dispute, despite this Court repeatedly pointing out to Meta that it was making a tactical choice not to issue subpoenas during the pendency of the dispute, even to the subset of agencies from which it most wanted information. TR 2/22/24 (Doc. 663, p. 37:8-23; TR 4/22/24 (Doc. 782), pp. 7:20-9:7; TR 5/6/24 (Doc. 822), pp. 101:4-15, 103:9-25, 104:6-9; Doc. 1031.

### D. The public interest weighs heavily in favor of a stay.

The public has a strong interest in the just and efficient vindication of the rights and protections afforded by consumer protection laws, as well as in the proper functioning of state government. *See Golden Gate Rest. Ass'n*, 512 F.3d at 1127 ("The public interest may be declared in the form of a statute." (quoting 11A Charles Alan Wright, Arthur R. Miller & Mary Kay Kane, Federal Practice and Procedure § 2948.4, at 207 (2d ed. 1995))). The order hampers this enforcement action, risks disrupting the relationships of independent state entities, and, in the future, imperils states' ability to pursue affirmative enforcement actions on behalf of the public and consumers in federal court.

Finally, the principles of federalism weigh in favor of a stay. Given that the order held that Rule 34 is governed only by federal law even where state law might limit control or disclosure, Doc. 1117, p.9, a stay while the state AGs object on state law grounds respects federalism and state sovereignty.

#### E. Conclusion

For all these reasons, the state AGs ask this Court to stay its Order, Doc. 1117, pending adjudication of their Motion for Relief.

I	Case 4:22-md-03047-YGR Document 1167	Filed 09/20/24 Page 6 of 16		
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